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Will You Empower Your Patrons to Buy eBooks?

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Other News

Will you empower your patrons to buy eBooks?

■ The Singapore Management University did just that!

The Assistant University Librarian for Technical Services, Sarena Law, first heard of patron driven access, PDA, while she was a librarian in Hong Kong prior to joining the Li Ka Shing Library at Singapore Management University. After hearing about PDA success stories at the Chicago ALA conference in 2009 she gathered support to try out PDA at the Li Ka Shing Library. Since the Library's mission is to provide service and access rather than ownership of large print collections, deciding to look into PDA was an easy decision. The Library set up a task force to examine the feasibility of allowing its users to 'spend' the Library's acquisitions budget on eBooks. The taskforce recommended a pilot project so as to be the first in Singapore, if not Asia.

■ What is Patron Driven Acquisitions (PDA)?

The main idea behind PDA is to introduce a novel way of letting users purchase eBooks from a vendor, in this case Coutts, using the MyLibrary platform. Simply put, the Coutts service makes content accessible to users via links in the library's online catalog. The library is billed only for content that has been accessed at least twice by authenticated users. Some studies have already shown that eBooks purchased by patrons themselves are used more often than those purchased by selectors. Today, the library's OPAC supports user input through Web 2.0 applications such as writing reviews, rating the resources, adding tags and using social bookmarks. Thus we thought, why not allow our users to co-purchase materials that they need rather than us purchasing materials they might not ever use.

■ How did we do it?

The task force leader brought together the team members who included the Acquisitions Librarian, Research Librarians for Business and Economics, the Metadata Librarian and the vendor. Each had a clear and specific role to play. The Acquisitions Librarian is a key person when communicating with the vendor to provide support for the trial, licensing, procurement, usage monitoring and logistics. The Research Librarians contributed by setting up the collection profiles for their respective subject areas. The vendor, Coutts, provided a list of eBook titles based on our selection criteria and parameters. The vendor provides titles up to five times the amount of money the library agrees to pay but the library pays for only those titles that users open twice. The Research Librarians carefully vetted the list so that we were comfortable with all of the titles placed in our catalog. The Metadata Librarian then did the de-duplication of titles and loaded the eBook MARC records in the OPAC. Finally, the Research Librarians beta tested the patron experience to ensure the stability of the system and process. PDA went live in early October. So far, we have not advertised this service since we were interested to see how the users would access the books as they appeared in the collection. Statistics show us that indeed users are viewing and purchasing the eBooks, even without our encouragement.

■ What did we learn?

According to Sarena Law, "Building library collections is collaborative work. The excitement of the PDA project is that it extends the involvement of our library users to the selection and purchase of eBooks and provides access to content instantaneously." We empowered our users to 'add' needed eBook titles through two clicks on a record in the library catalogue even though users do not know they are accessing a book the library does not yet own. For the library staff, working together as a team and understanding each other's requirements was one of the hallmarks for success. It is important to give clear guidelines and set up profiles for the vendor to enable the selection of academic eBook titles from reputable publishers. Communicating fully with the vendor is crucial. The process of de-duplication helps to ensure that the selection of titles is unique in the SMU collection. According to Research Librarian Rajen Munoo, "The initial selection of items focused on business titles but we later revised it to include economics to widen the scope. This highlights the interdisciplinary or 'graying'

of subject areas that requires the Research Librarians to work closely together and no longer work in silos."

The Singapore Management University brands itself as a different 'U' and supporting this difference is the library which empowers its users to be actively involved in the use of the library and its resources.

Contributed by Sarena Law, Rajen Munoo and the PDA Team, Li Ka Shing Library, Singapore Management University.

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